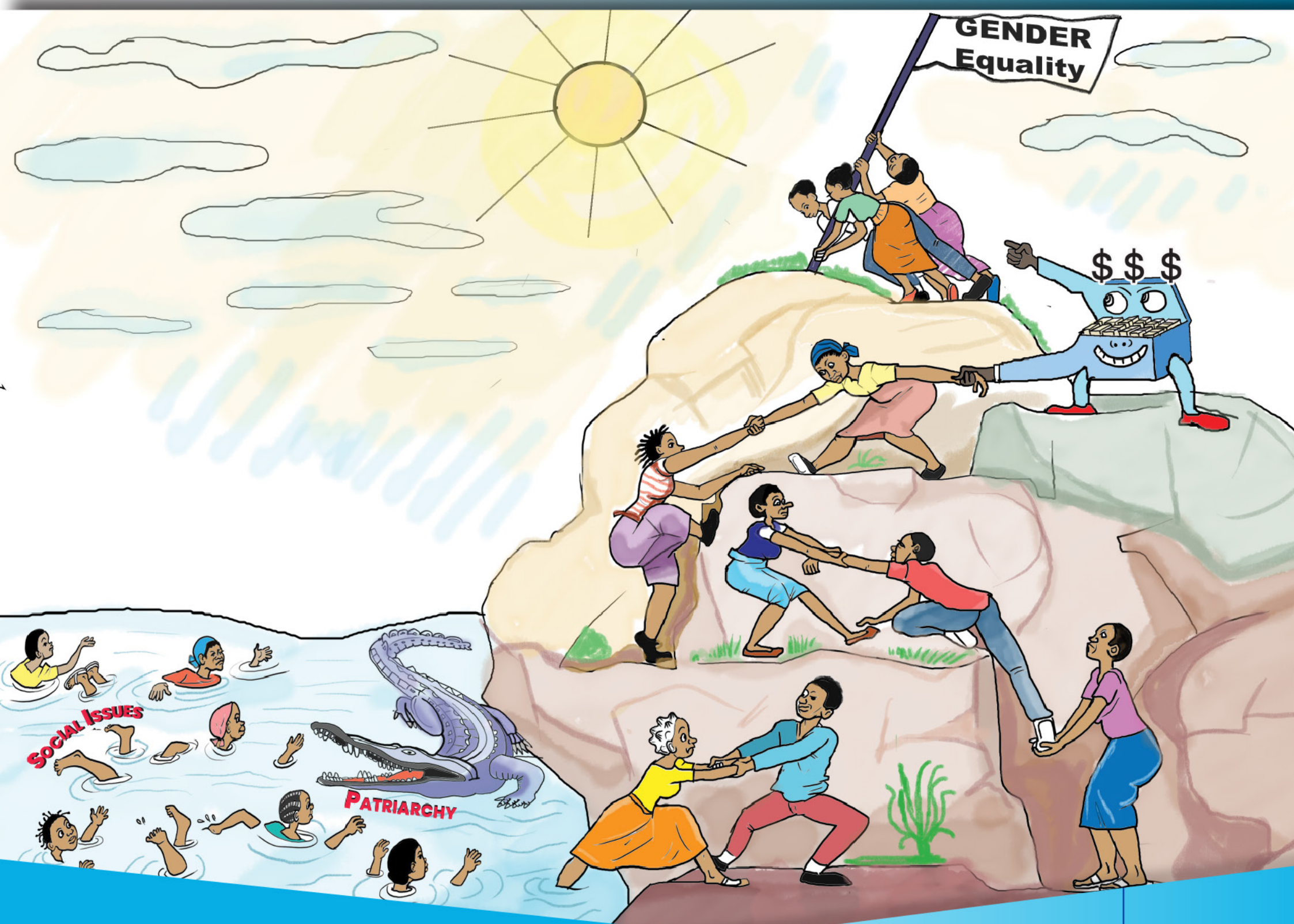




AFRICAN WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT FUND

Sustaining Women's Leadership



BEYOND THE BARRIERS
WOMEN AND GIRLS LEADING DIFFERENTLY IN UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing global commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions across political, economic, and social spheres. Leadership continues to be shaped by patriarchal structures, gender stereotypes, and socio-cultural norms that favor men and limit women's opportunities to ascend to decision-making roles. In many societies, leadership is still perceived as a masculine domain, which discourages women from aspiring to leadership or results in their exclusion from leadership pipelines.

Structural barriers such as unequal access to education, limited mentorship and networking opportunities, gender pay gaps, and discriminatory recruitment and promotion practices further compound women's marginalization. Additionally, the heavy burden of unpaid care work and societal expectations that women should prioritize domestic responsibilities over professional advancement often restrict their availability for leadership roles.



Political and institutional systems also tend to lack gender-sensitive policies and environments that support women's participation, making it difficult for them to navigate male-dominated spaces. In some contexts, violence, harassment, and negative attitudes toward women leaders erode their confidence and discourage others from stepping forward.

Understanding these barriers is important for developing strategies that promote women's equal participation and representation in leadership. Removing these obstacles not only fulfills principles of social justice and equality but also strengthens governance, organizational performance, and community development. Empowering women to lead ensures that diverse voices,

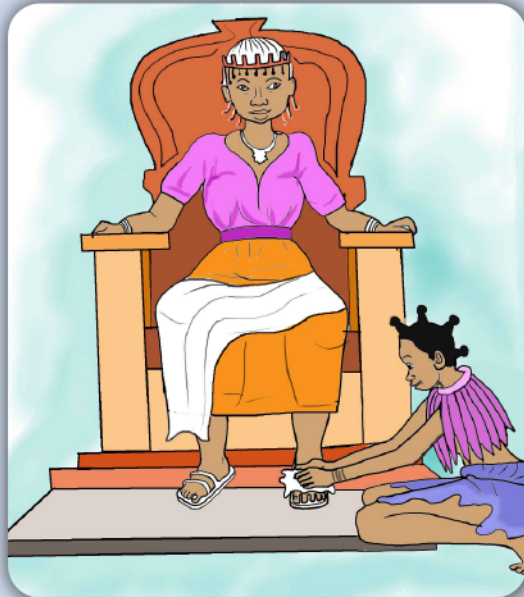
experiences, and perspectives shape decisions that affect societies as a whole.

This booklet is a mirror. See the young girl in school debating against stereotypes. See the mother balancing household chores and community work. See the councilor refusing to be silenced. Feel the fire. And join the movement of women working together to create the change we want to see.



A LEGACY OF STRENGTH

**PRECOLONIAL
QUEEN
MOTHERS**



**MODERN CLIMATE/
SOCIAL JUSTICE**



**GRASSROOTS
ACTIVIST**



**WOMEN SHAPING
NARRATIVES**

**EARLY
FEMALE MPS**



**FEMINIST
LEADERS**



Long before ballots and parliaments, women ruled clans, negotiated peace, and led communities. Some were queens guiding clans through conflict; some were mothers who taught survival and justice to children. Women like Dr. Hilda Tadria, Prof Silvia Tamale advocated for equality and social development, Joyce R. Mpanga fought to change societal norms and inspire girls to claim leadership despite bias, among others.

In the 1990s in Uganda, MPs and local council women began stepping into formal governance spaces, facing ridicule, threats, and exclusion but persevering. Today, women lead movements, cooperatives, and advocacy groups, shaping policy and mobilizing communities. Their stories are not isolated; they are threads in a fabric of resilience, courage, and leadership.

THE MOUNTAINS WE CLIMB



For every woman who reaches the top, there are scars unseen. The girl denied school leadership because “it’s for boys.” The mother was silenced by domestic violence while leading community initiatives. The councillor was ignored in council meetings despite their knowledge and commitment. The activist was threatened for raising her voice on political, economic or social justice.

The climb is steep. The paths are many, intersecting, sometimes blocked. But with courage, solidarity, and resilience, women keep climbing—and in doing so, they lift others with them.

ECHOES FROM THE GROUND



"I wanted to be a prefect. The teacher said, 'Let the boys lead.' I kept organizing my friends anyway."

"In council, they laughed at our ideas. We documented evidence, rallied youth, and eventually influenced policy."

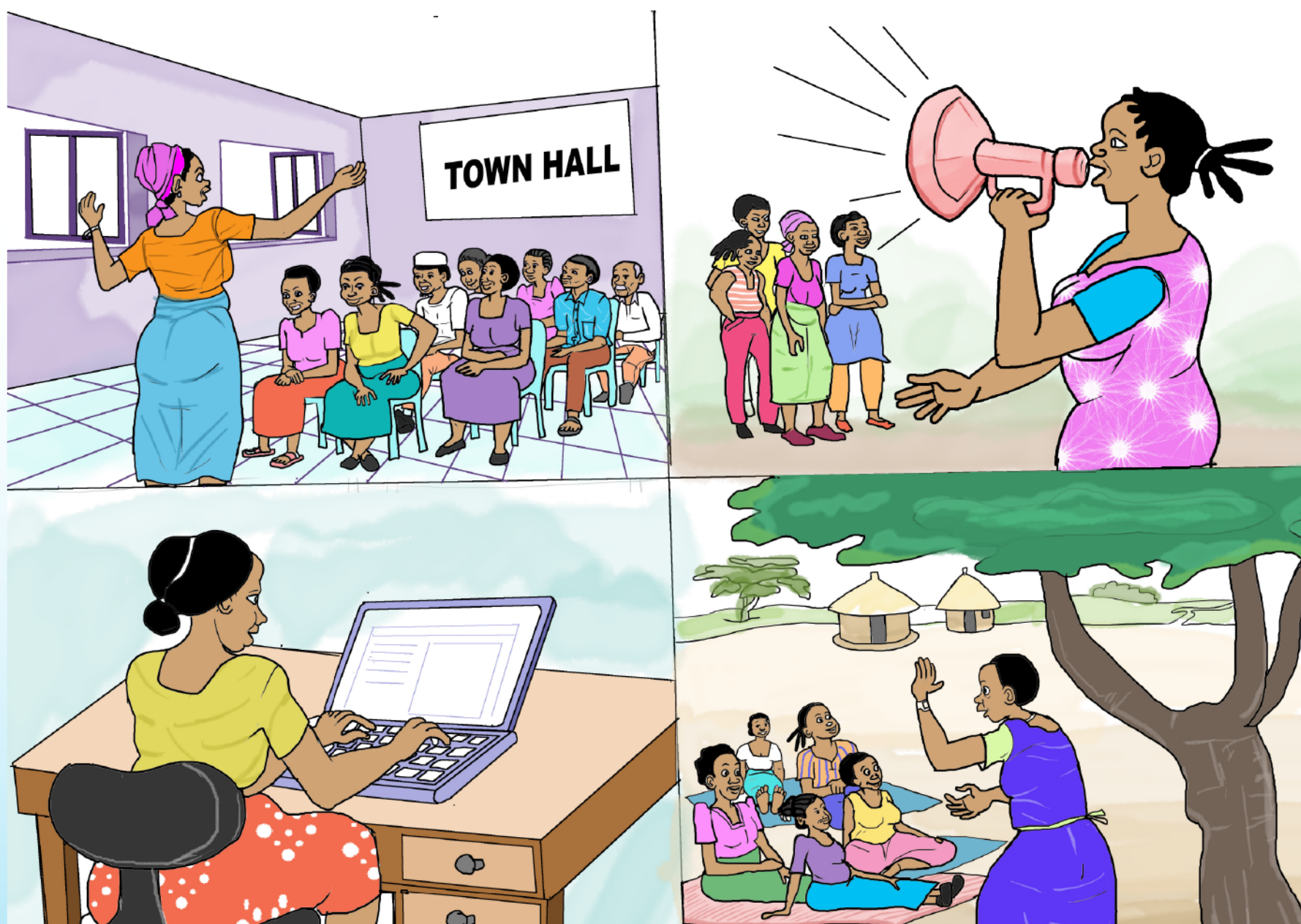


"As a health worker, I had to speak to parents about girls' education and rights. It wasn't easy, but when one girl finished school, it made it all worth it."



"We were cheated at the market. Together we formed a cooperative, trained younger women, and set fair prices."

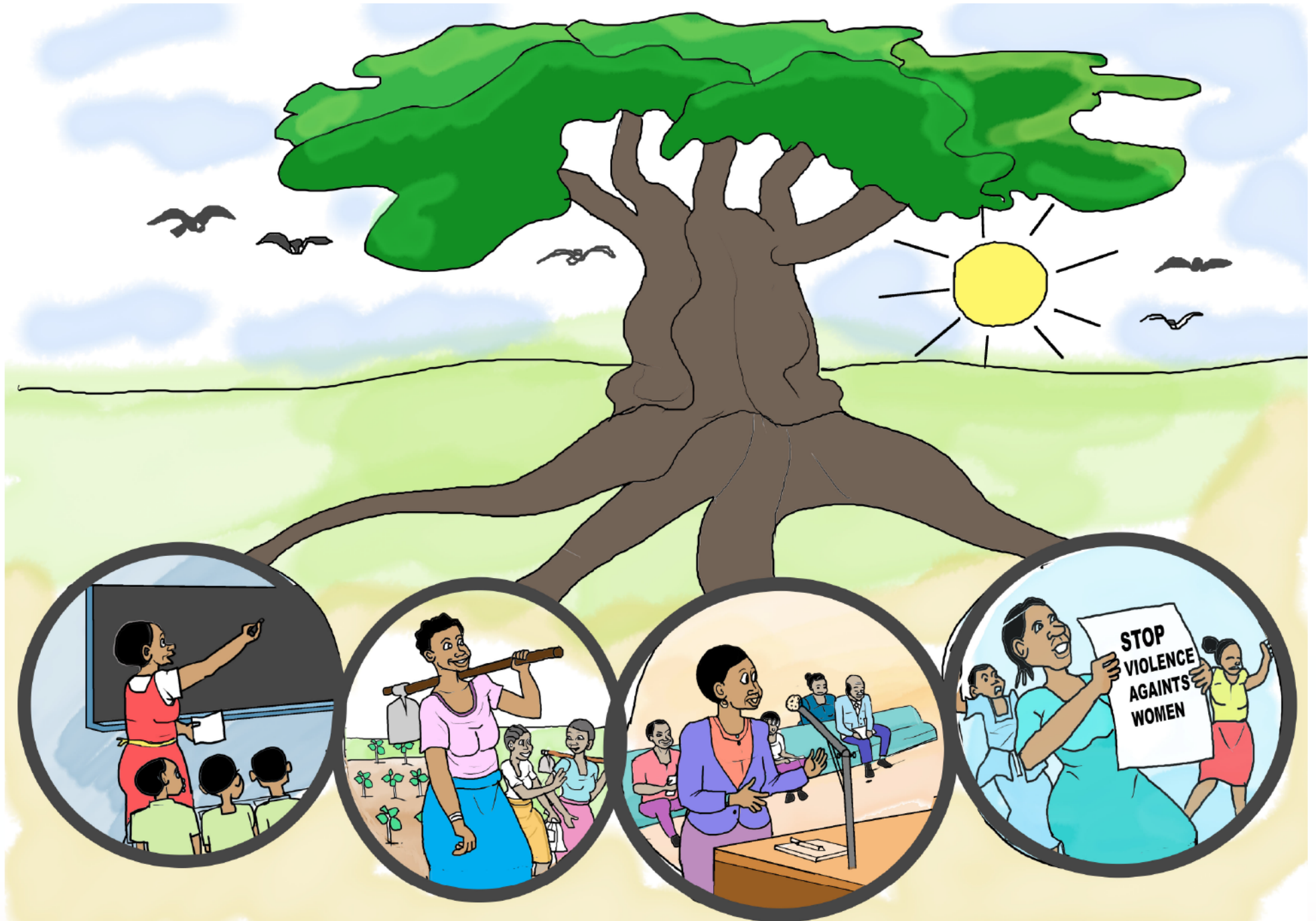
WOMEN AS MOVEMENT BUILDERS



Change is never given, it is taken. Women's movements in Uganda are built from many roles: the organizer who maps the community, the mentor who lifts young girls into leadership, the activist who marches for climate justice, the farmer who leads a cooperative to fair trade, the teacher advocating for girls' retention in school.

Each role is vital. Together, they form networks of power and solidarity that rewrite rules and build new opportunities. Women build movements brick by brick, voice by voice, hand in hand.

THE POWER OF SISTERHOOD



One woman alone is a voice. Many together are thunder. Networks, mentorship, and sisterhood carry women further than anyone could go alone. The mother teaches her daughter, the elder mentors young activists, women farmers share knowledge with each other. Every hand lifted another. Every sister carries forward the next. This is how leadership is sustained through relationships, guidance, and solidarity.

The Torch To Young Women



To the daughters: your voice is not too young, your dream is not too small. Start where you are: school debates, community clubs, social media campaigns, or local activism. Leadership is not a crown; it is a step. And the first step is yours to take.

See yourself in mentors around you. Seek guidance, build your skills, and carry forward the torch for the next generation.



ALLIES IN THE STRUGGLE

Patriarchy is not just a women's problem it limits everyone. Fathers who educate daughters, men and boys who work with women and girls everyday, brothers who share chores, leaders who amplify women's voices—they are builders of a Uganda that is more free. Change is heavier when carried alone; lighter when carried together. Leadership is collective, and everyone has a role.



The Future **We Deserve**

We dream of a Uganda where no girl is told she cannot lead, where no woman is silenced by fear, where movements rise stronger than barriers. We dream of communities where mentorship, networks, and solidarity make leadership accessible to all. This is not just a dream—it is a duty. Rise, speak, act—the future is waiting.



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